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## THE HILL'S Congress Blog

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# Mercenaries in Libya: Gadhafi's hired terrorists

By Edward M. Gabriel

Two weeks have passed since U.S. military forces tracked down Osama bin Laden and finally brought him to justice, a decade after 9/11.

But while bin Laden is dead, the hate and violence he preached clearly isn't. The deadly bombing in Morocco — which killed 17 and has been linked to an al Qaeda loyalist — is the most recent evidence of this.

In Libya, terrorism has a different, yet disturbing face, where hired mercenaries are terrorizing the Libyan opposition. Senior NATO officials have received information that Moammar Gadhafi is spending millions to hire mercenaries from the Polisario Front in Algeria and elsewhere to help fight the U.N.-backed coalition and quash Libyans who oppose his dictatorial regime. Credible sources report that hundreds of Polisario mercenaries are being paid \$10,000 each by Gadhafi to cross Algeria into Libya to fight NATO-led forces and kill Libyan protesters and rebels.

In other words, the Polisario Front, which touts itself as a human rights champion and gets millions in humanitarian aid from the U.S. and Europe through the United Nations, is letting its members take up arms against U.S.-allied NATO forces, in defiance of the U.N. Security Council mandate, and join Gadhafi's military campaign against the people of Libya.

As a former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco and someone who has followed the Middle East and North Africa closely for more than three decades, I find it outrageous that the Polisario Front continues to enjoy a civil reception in the official corridors of the U.S. administration and Congress, even while many of its members are engaged in a deadly shooting war against NATO forces in Libya.

And Algeria, which was one of only two Arab League nations to vote against a U.N. no-fly zone in Libya, is duplicitous in opposing U.N.-sanctioned military action against Libya while providing materiel to support Gadhafi's forces. After capturing 15 Algerian mercenaries last month, Libyan rebel leaders charged Algeria with backing Gadhafi and "turning a blind eye" to mercenaries crossing into Libya. More recently, Libyan opposition leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil — who met with senior Obama administration officials in the White House Friday — charged that Algerian planes have been used to fly mercenaries to fight Libyan rebels. And the Africa News Agency in London now reports that 500 combat-equipped light trucks have been sent to Libya from Algeria.

If the details about mercenaries received by NATO officials are accurate, both the leadership of the Polisario and Algerian authorities stand complicit in Gadhafi's efforts to reinforce his mercenary army. It is inconceivable that hundreds of Polisario mercenaries could be hired in the first place, or travel more than 1,000 miles from the isolated, Polisario-run camps in southwestern Algeria, without the tacit, if not explicit, support of Polisario and Algerian leaders.

Recent reports from press and policy experts have linked Polisario members to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Latin American drug cartels, and other criminal groups operating in the Sahel region in Africa. Terrorist bands in these lawless expanses have kidnapped and killed foreign nationals, and engaged in illegal trafficking of drugs, arms, people and humanitarian relief supplies.

This is unacceptable. These charges of mercenary and criminal activity in Libya must be fully examined and investigated, and the U.S. government must hold the Polisario Front and Algeria accountable for their actions and complicity. Rather than welcome them into the halls of Congress and the U.S. administration, and let them exploit our generous aid dollars, those who dare to take up arms against the U.S. and its NATO allies should face very serious consequences.

*Edward M. Gabriel served as US Ambassador to Morocco from 1997 to 2001, and currently advises the government of Morocco.*

## FORMER US AMBASSADORS TO MOROCCO

April 19, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

By way of introduction, we are former US ambassadors to Morocco – “former” rather than “retired” because we all stay in touch with developments in that country where we proudly represented our own. While we encompass different political viewpoints and ways of life, we are all concerned, as you are, with the future of US-Moroccan relations at this particularly dramatic moment in the history of North Africa.

We want to applaud your recent public statement after you met with the Moroccan Foreign Minister in Washington and your commitment to “further deepening our strong and strategic partnership.” Your March 23 press conference unambiguously aligned the United States with the aspects of Moroccan policy which deserve to be supported: further strides toward true democracy including reform of the parliamentary, administering and judicial elements of the government; enhancement of civil and human rights; and solutions to social and economic issues, including corruption, that concern the population. Significantly, you praised Morocco for being ready to lead the way in the Middle East concerning social, political and economic reforms. We also commend your praise of King Mohammed VI’s historic speech of March 9th, in which he laid down timelines and a consultative process that decisively commits Morocco to accelerating these reforms. He thus acknowledged the legitimacy of young job seekers and other aspirants for improvements in living standards, and aligned himself with concerns expressed by the average Moroccan in the streets – a commendable exception to the way most leaders have reacted in the region.

This democratic path, from which the King has made clear that there is no turning back, will also benefit US policy. Your continued encouragement and our national leadership will be decisive on the issue of political and social reform not only in Morocco but in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

As for regional concerns, we also welcome your emphasis on addressing divisive issues that have too long envenomed neighborly relations and prevented regional integration. Regarding the Western Sahara, you justly underlined the longstanding US position that Morocco’s autonomy plan is “serious, realistic, and credible.” This Moroccan initiative is designed

to become the instrument by which the United Nations can, as you said, "satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity." Resolving this conflict will also create another area of peace in a suffering world.

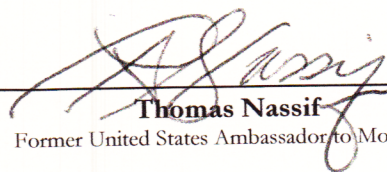
We believe that these matters with which you are dealing are of urgent concern and we trust they shall not be neglected as the US focuses on one global issue after another. Morocco, our earliest ally, has taken a stand next to the US at strategic moments, most recently at the time of the convening of the allied group in Paris concerning the Libyan situation.

We decisively support and applaud the policy objectives you are pursuing with Morocco, which demonstrate our leadership role around the world.

Sincerely,



**Joseph Verner Reed, Jr.**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



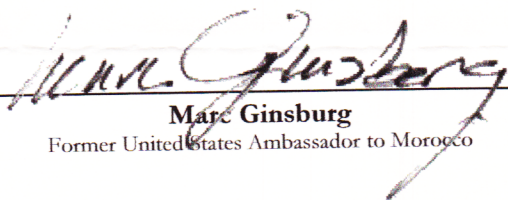
**Thomas Nassif**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



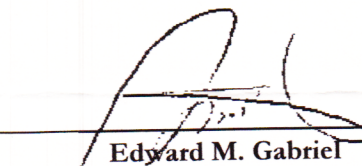
**Michael Ussery**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



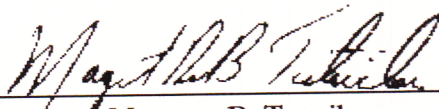
**Frederick Vreeland**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



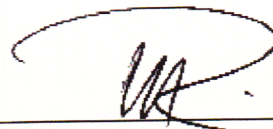
**Marc Ginsburg**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



**Edward M. Gabriel**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



**Margaret D. Tutwiler**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco



**Thomas Riley**  
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco